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E N   R O U T E

1919-1939



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BY H. E. A. PLATT

O X F O R D

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# P R E L U D E S



If I am mad, I thank my God  
For making me as gaily odd  
As a few yards of woodland sod.

I took a path among great trees  
Ever in prayer upon their knees.  
I said, 'I am too young for these.'

Between their upflung arms one space  
Of sunlight like a laughing face  
Looked down upon our meeting place.

In sudden prayer I shut my eyes  
For thought as open as the skies,  
Joy like a high wind, blindly wise.

And in my feet I felt begin  
A dance that made me leap and spin  
And know the deep earth moved therein.

If I am mad, I thank my God  
For making me thus gaily odd  
As those few yards of woodland sod.

‘Y o u have a God, O wildflower at my feet.  
Is he live dust with whom, your trinity,  
One are an earth-born rain, a sun-born heat?’

Or teach the winds a gay mythology  
Where seasons blossom as immortal flowers  
In gardens that behind the dawn may be?

Tell me. I would resign mere human powers  
Only to understand you when you nod  
So gaily and with grace that is not ours.’

‘Someone in passing broke my narrow pod.  
He gave me strength and joy to feel the sun,  
To work within the earth. He is my God.’

And barefoot through the grass I heard Him run  
Racing the wind, and with His sunlit hair  
Struck blind I scarcely saw that heedless one.

I had not thought of God as young and fair.

BECAUSE a gale raved from the hill  
I laughed and disobeyed his will  
To feel his strength go past  
High on the ridge at last.

I laughed and whence I came was thrust  
To run, as leaves in autumn must,  
Downhill, athwart the track,  
His fury at my back.

The long, wet grass like weariness  
Might snare my feet but I could press  
On to those raging trees  
Daring the gale to seize

And shake me madly in his fist  
Like any leaf or drop of mist  
Whose ruin fled with me  
In passionate sympathy.

But then I tired and in the wood  
Fell and lay hid as best I could;  
With earth against my skin  
I felt the night begin.

The leaves that crept to cover me  
Were dead, at rest. Too strong was he,  
And they would have me stay;  
Scarce could I come away.

Now silver under hurried skies,  
Where all day there has blown a gale,  
The sunset, calm as ever, lies.  
Now all my heart's loud voices fail,  
Their long discussion dies.

Somewhere a bird sings on; close by  
A leaf falls slowly to its rest.  
These neither worship nor deny  
Their God and yet with peace are blest.  
And one of these am I.

A L T H O U G H with silence too long fettered  
I handled a whole armoury.

There—when at last a link had given—  
—Hung ready the one blade for me.

I am stray seed blown unreturning,  
A dust trod into littleness.

By passing feet I shall be planted  
Nor therefore strike one root the less.



A M O R E S I



Now is my love so sure that all the more it strengthens  
Knowing you not truly beautiful.

Beauty is but a statue posed: no fountain playing  
Can be cold as she or emptier.

Hers are the young untried, the ageing truth has frightened,  
Hers are they—and tired, lewd old men.

Often, soon after dawn, the sun must fall  
Across this river, with such gentleness,  
To glance between the curtain and the wall  
And find you here and stay to watch no less  
The depth, the even movement of your sleep.

Soon I must wake and leave you. As I dress,  
Light is your unconcerned, slow breathing, deep  
The soft voice of the river over all.

Now the whole room aches with lonely darkness,  
 Now I lie unrested, never sleeping,  
 Let me think of nights when all my longing,  
 Set strong towards you  
 As a south wind comes into this garden,  
 Still could find your sleep cool and faint-scented.

There your breathing was like summer branches  
 Stirred in the still dusk  
 And your face asleep, not wholly darkened,  
 Starlit drooping, blossom of the white rose.  
 There your lips were warm grapes that had ripened  
 All through a hot noon.

Even sleeping you would move towards me  
 (As a bank of flowers the wind blows over  
 Let the wind come, takes his whole strong motion,  
 Suddenly keeps still)  
 And in our one bed would we two lovers  
 Know the whole joy of sown earth in April  
 Busy in the quiet heat or sweetly  
 Troubled with showers.

• • • • •

Late into the night a wind was moving,  
 Shaking the full leaf of happy branches,  
 Pleasing secret buds.

Now that the darkness  
Listens to silence  
(Every wind tired out, the last dew fallen)  
Would that still your breasts were my two handfuls,  
Would my flank and your small hips' neat fullness  
Yet slept together.

. . . . .

With how sure a joy these summer mornings  
Wake, the sunrise touching open roses.  
You must wake alone now. Even daybreak  
Cannot but taunt me.

I T is best like this—  
—That I wear still wise cowardice  
And you your formal courage  
When we meet.

So we sit often talking,  
Looking sometimes  
Towards the mountains broken down with gullies  
And streams gone astray on the plain.

Once we both gladly travelled such country,  
We were very gay there,  
But it was not together that we went  
And it will not be together that we go again.

Though you only read this many years later  
You will know to whom I wrote it.  
You will know and not regret  
It has only this to say.

Out of the night I came  
Away from open ground and a clear sky—  
—Ahead, like embers in a furnace  
Heaped up, this lighted town.

Down the last hedge there passed  
A wind that seemed to take leave once for all:  
Lamp after lamp kept watch upon me,  
The blazing stars were dulled.

Even then all this road  
Was haunted by the parting we would know.  
Still was my whole thought how I loved you.  
Would it were now but that.

LONG hours since has a young moon setting  
 Left asleep by the tireless river  
 Houses sad as tombs, in heaped shadow,  
 Quiet as ruins.

Here and there under empty arches  
 Lamps are still on watch still must waken;  
 Built of stars the whole sky above me,  
 Lit like a city.

Many here the nights I must weary  
 Eyes unsleeping, the heart as restless,  
 Slowly tracing a foreign script of  
 Far constellations.

Sometimes now through the town there hurry  
 Timid lights with huge darkness haunted  
 Or a falling star's inspiration  
 Burns for one moment.

Ah, my love, could but you be with me  
 Then wholly ours were this contentment  
 Sung in jewelled phrases of starlight,  
 Moving with slow rhythm

Through the summer night's splendid diction.  
 We would know how the town below us,  
 Feeling this river's arm flung round her,  
 Sleeps in such quiet—

—We, who then were like fixed stars always  
 Sure of peace, sure to be together  
 All night long and, in night's indifference,  
 Sure of each other.

•

# IMPLESES



STILL heat suppressed under low trees  
All along the water;  
And only hot rock on the ridge of the island.

Salt rot in the wind,  
Warmth in the rank sea;  
Low pulses of the tropic tide turned back  
Upon their shallow circulation.

But the young rice  
Strong, blazing green;  
Behind rapt inlets the backwater  
A blue inspired.

This run of youth in my blood  
Once known here, here recorded,  
Death and the very after-death  
Now at least I defy.

ONLY enraptured with effort  
 The blood learns its wisdom.

The taut, driven nerve may see clear, attain vision,  
 Once tree of thought.

Frost upon steel was the river  
 I washed in at starting,  
 The cold like a bruise on each foot. A first twilit  
 Half-hour I rode—

Dawn's glint of ice for horizon  
 And thence, flooding by me,  
 In one steady current the chill of the morning,  
 Stars to the west.

Then did the hills wake. Their headlands,  
 With shadows in ambush,  
 Looked east and forgot from that moment the threatened  
 Slopes' firth of dusk.

Then from ahead there came daybreak  
 Unconsciously reasoned—  
 —The force of blind longing, a heart's slow conviction—  
 —There centred light.

So, as I stooped to my girthing,  
 Shone suddenly detailed  
 My horse's grey flank with the tightening buckle,  
 Bright earth below.

So, when I turned and remounted,  
The hillside had kindled.

White-heat blown to flame was the east and to westward,  
Blank through the sky,

Radiant that blank, like a snowfield.  
And then at last sunrise

With colour inspired the least stone, gave to distance  
Visions of light.

Good to ride ever in sunlight  
And always have with me

My horse like another live self—to feel sinew  
Braced but at rest.

Good to ride on still, though morning  
Might leave the sky molten,

Hot distance translucent with haze, nearer desert  
Fused to one glare.

Motion and sound of my going  
A rhythm unbroken;

Alternate with quiet the wind's even cadence;  
Ranged down the sky.

Hills huge as cloud, against cloudless  
Blue calm of clear weather,

Or massed like a storm and with shadows of colour  
Lit in slow change.

Only enraptured with effort  
The blood learns its wisdom.

The taut, driven nerve may see clear, attain vision,  
Once free of thought.

W R O U G H T metal struck is the bazaar's whole sound,  
So shrill this tireless wrangle of tapped copper,  
So grave these arguments of hammered iron.

More than the crowd it peoples crowded air  
(Archway to dome hawks louder yet its copper,  
Struck dumb are our mere words by angry iron).

In this absorbed live air still let the copper  
Deafen with rapid speech and leave dead iron  
Repeating with a latent rage dull sound.

Round us, in hidden courtyards, the same air  
Was all this time alone—the listening air  
That heard aright too long debated sound.

There learn to judge mock energies of copper,  
Interpret rhythmical, fanatic iron.

WRITING here late at night,  
(The lamp turned low, a secret, for fear my window  
Open on restless trees and then but distance,  
Let it flare once in vain and so go out).

What if I wholly fail,  
Against a sane indifference who pit unreason  
Yet must believe this heart, once rightly uttered,  
Lasting as history, worth all my life?

Fallen at last the wind;  
Beyond the still trees night is aware of starlight.  
O deep unrest, O re-inspired, rare moments,  
They who once know you dare not wholly fail.

W O U L D I might leave now,  
Never end another spring here,  
Turn from these watching mountains, the sown plain,  
and not look back.

Only too soon now  
Burns to death the judas-blossom,  
Wake from their snow the upper gullies, flooding in  
one night.

Time to be leaving:  
What were ecstasies, when first known,  
Prove but a yearly mood. I would not test that yet  
again.

O to be leaving  
Now, the mood but just beginning,  
Now, here at least immortal still the myth of its gay  
youth.

# LANDSCAPES



Two great ridges,  
The further a presence winged with snow,  
Under the sky of sunlight.

And long tracks, the river, all the lines of the  
country,  
Lead to a proud bridge,  
A sudden town self-centred in one hill—

—The minute, indisputable signature  
Set to a masterpiece.

THE palm of my hand, this empty country,  
Cut with inscrutable lines.

The foot-hills (there far off, a coast deserted,  
And there, above the other town, a wave that breaks)  
Rush by here with the light into a sunset, flooding.

And here too there is always  
My unself-conscious body  
I am so much alone with,  
I know so little.

A t sunset crows fly cawing  
Against snow on the ridge  
And below them, through the city,  
Go cars with their urgent horns  
Sounded again and again.

Blandly the electric light watches  
Where I work late  
In this separate upper office.

Could words now reach  
A crisis of expression,  
Like that of sunset fused with snow  
And burnt to ashes in clear flame,  
I might not hear sardonic thought call vaguely  
Nor need ever to shape another line,  
Lulled in these sure mechanics by a live,  
immediate city.

To feel, that noon, at last in shade of trees,  
Like a pack flung off,  
Hot sun no longer heavy on my shoulders;

Only to hear  
An empty laughter from the mule-bells,  
The thoughtless stream in idle conversation;

To ride on into sunlight,  
One peak ahead  
A lifted eyebrow of old snow;

These were enough then—now they would not be  
enough.

I must never go back there.

AMORES II



W H A T E V E R comes of this, regret it never.

Now it is near dawn and we have not slept yet.  
Often last night an urgent rain poured down;  
Often your house, hushed in forgotten by-roads,  
Yet in less happy rooms than this long restless,  
Heightened with fear my strong possession of you.  
Still we lie touching. It is near dawn now.

To have denied me this were your true self's denial.  
Not to have dared take this were my true faith betrayed.  
Whatever end this has, regret it we shall not.

ONLY as your lover  
Do I dare be truly gay—  
—Ah, the broad smiles of your hip.

Our little gestures,  
Making love,  
Are shared, like small, secret jokes;  
This horseplay of instinct between our bodies  
Is the one eternal humour;  
Only now is my heart  
Freed of profound, hid laughter.

THE lorries pull in here for shelter:  
Ahead the road is rumoured bad.

Speed for a time from both loves, coward lover.  
Yours no choice to break with either, true divided  
heart.

Southward the bright plains' ebbing colour:  
Northward steadfast ranges under snow;  
Here, in between, the mud-built resthouse.  
O and this is saner than her bedroom—  
—Very freedom, thought of by the other's  
fireside.

Who are you to risk decision, lonely, restless  
blood?

The lorries pull in here for shelter:  
Ahead the road is rumoured bad.

THIS spring the river there will not have flooded.  
Once, last year, it broke and levelled steep banks,  
And we watched the current swerve right out of its channel,  
Stumble on rock, and bolt, and head for the plain.

Then was our living headlong, a brave panic,  
Then was our loving an inspired intrigue.  
Deeper though later love be we must never  
Dare disown this, our outlawed, gay amour.

A N G E R S



ONE loud main street, blatant as a fair-day:  
Petty gardens cramping one another:  
Short-sighted windows evilly competing  
Here to overlook, there to secrete.

Small rooms always watching the one street-front,  
Seeing only that, shut from each other:  
Great aisles arching silence, the high windows  
Open to a blank wall's narrow light.

A N eagerness for games your only ecstasy,  
Lull judgment with complacent muscle tired,  
Looking down from horseback, that viewpoint out  
of date.

For the instinctive art of talk  
Choose drugging  
With cards and their barren mathematics:  
To music that is communal experience  
Prefer flawed intercourse by treated drinks.

The choice was free and you have chosen.

But, that you make a local patriotism,  
Well-tailored ritual, hospitalities,  
Worth more than hard thought  
Or a high and troubled faith,  
This brings athwart your stream in its short flood  
The patient justice of stark economics,  
That glacier toiling at our very source.

U N D E R the hill of planted woods run wild,  
Above the drained marsh rank from yearlong rain,  
This ruined house had once its own fit life—  
—To change, like growing mould,  
Earthbound with deep-laid stone.

But you restore here,  
You would deform an elemental process,  
The right of earth to let decay—  
—You who shore up dead faiths  
When ritual alone has been left standing  
And act by blind, adapted usage  
And mend the prettiness of small antiques,  
Since none of these  
Will test you with splendid, dangerous changes.

To this appreciates  
The invested prejudice of years, and it is thus  
Fears for the comfort of mere old age  
Deflect with compromise  
The inspired resultant of inevitable truths.

DRIVE by, exploiter,  
You single, mechanised purpose,  
Undiscerning as desire.

Or ride aloof tracks  
To frame in foreign skyline  
Ideals untested.

Experience passed at a distance:  
No steady growth, nor from deep soil:  
Soon a lost, hurrying dust.

# DECISIONS



You have a hard faith to keep  
 Who see as far and clear  
 As only revolt dares see.

The deliberate choice you must make  
 Of a back street and hidden waste ground  
 As the truth of all our triumphing cities:  
 Your groping lives of argument  
 In narrow rooms, in soiled air:  
 The incompetent hurry for death  
 That leaves us  
 But shouted thought they will talk down as madness.

I may not stand with you, nor do you need me—  
 —I who have borrowed my life  
 On the security of service pledged  
 To what you will deny with a chosen death;  
 Who, from your subsidised wrongs,  
 Draw now accruing comfort.  
 But here shall this much be recorded.

It is those deserts  
 Hold latent in drought  
 The fertility for each re-birth:  
 From such manure germinate  
 Basic, live forces:  
 Your lonely courage is worth all  
 Of our drilled effort,  
 For loyalty that has its known rewards.

ENLISTED by these livelihoods  
In mere comfort's cause  
We let run underground  
Springs of angry strength.

A time comes  
When sure, private faith  
One vote from our professional thought will silence;  
When the brave truth spoken  
Cannot be blaspheme, is a treason.

Now I will remember how our true force,  
That knows not any defeat or last victory  
But the full life of change unending,  
Comes, aloof as dawn, from the hid cumulative  
And is strong as spring in its recurrence.

Our conscious thought  
Is less than earthworms know  
Of how rain in late summer  
Affects the marketing of corn grown over them.

And this mean patriotism of ours  
Was no more planned for by the deep-sea life,  
Now but a chalk dust sloping  
Our native hills,  
Than it shall rank  
With the trends of that real, instinctive purpose.

Loud sound resolute streams  
Outrunning thought  
Each side of a straight road  
That reaches for the mountains—  
—A new road to bound the coming city,  
Whose whole conception is for open sunlight,  
Whose inspiration  
Was the long prospects of one lasting view.

Now in blank doubt  
The ashen mist walls off  
That peak's achievement,  
The ridges worn to grace by their set purpose.

Wherever there shall come  
Regret for the peace of this inaction  
(Whether in the crisis of failure  
Or lost among tired purposes at war)  
My comfort it must be that inert sky  
Weighed on these hours thus heavily.

WITHOUT the rebel's driving hail of courage,  
Inept with supplied tools of thought long trained,  
My life is test of little: no wrong pays me  
The compliment of hatred or of fear.

At least I will secrete within me truth—  
—Some utter truth, impartial as the sea—  
—To give at last, in evidence for the future,  
To speak sometimes, into their faces, before I am silenced.

AMORES III



THE curtained window giving  
Upon full sunlight  
Is itself in shade.  
But for a dug course for the casual stream,  
Here would be only stone dry earth is breaking,  
Never a garden.

Grown old now  
All introspection from these many books:  
Less than skin-deep  
The ideas fixed in my small pictures.

Only together  
Can we free into the future  
Our elemental force for change.  
Rests upon this  
The right of private happiness  
We have dared claim.

Certain as pain, distinct as heat or cold,  
The second's pagan gesture  
Between our naked hearts.

LIKE dust the wind of living drove me far.  
Now I lie deep, here at the dust-storm's centre.

Lie back. After this I shall never ask  
To ride again, my horse and I at one,  
Or swim again with heavy, tropic breakers  
Warm over me, moved inly.

Like dust the wind of living drove me far.  
Now to this one lamp, here by your bed,  
Be narrowed all my skylines' empty light.  
Here be forgotten even  
Those plains in sunlight, ecstatic with sharp silence,  
That mountain distance scarred with radiant snow,  
Now I lie deep, here at the dust-storm's centre.

THIS house at a turn in the river  
Has round it, inconsequently lovely,  
The dusty oleanders;  
The stream passes by here  
Alert, on its way.

We question nor the silting current,  
Nor blossom in disorder in a hot wind.  
We live together, we lovers,  
The meaning of our love its living,  
Mere life the reason we love.

Now is to possess one another  
Not so much nerves in ecstasy  
As the new blood of a cure succeeding.

First possession  
Was the tide coming in  
Where old, idle gulfs  
Had made a lake of the sea.

But now  
Charged hearts run sweetly,  
Re-charge off their own power.

From the river that goes deep unconsciously  
Straight past this house comes a street  
To where all day the main road  
Floods like a vein with intent traffic.

And at night, out of silence,  
Cars pass with no horn sounded,  
Certain and self-contained,  
And our unthinking quiet steers us  
Out into tidal sleep.

ALL I can ever write  
Has no more chance to last  
Than the faint pencil on rough paper  
Recording this.

Torn scraps of catchword,  
The line that many purposes misuse,  
Such are the best of its hopes.

Inexpressible are your gestures  
Of infinite life, of immediate loveliness,  
The vision in my moods.

With our child born,  
To genius may yet converge  
These, our two urgent trends,  
Or to infinity be raised,  
Innate as race, their motifs.

ALONG this road of the town  
Come only routine sounds  
And our room is intimately hushed.  
Waits in you  
To end with birth its first experiment  
The life that you have formed from me.

In this new testing of us  
Still be our search  
For the moment's storm of vision,  
The second's flooding suddenly pregnant.

It is that vision  
High wind and the quick river always follow:  
White by that vivid sea are radiant cities  
Sometimes the passing unreturning traveller  
finds.

# BELIEFS



HORN, dead slow, gear-change;  
Gathered power, gear-change;  
Speed, shrill metals, speed, speed, air-flow, speed  
into the distance.

Instinctive as a horseman's the apt hand,  
Daring the judgment as his ever was,  
Nor here his groping, taut preoccupations.

Watch. The first, faulty streamline has not yet  
A schooled fitness, like the thoroughbred's.  
Once to have seen this they shall long years hence,  
As we have longed to see in movement, judge  
Those riders jotted round archaic urns.

Horn, dead-slow, gear-change;  
Gathered power, gear-change;  
Speed, shrill metals, speed, speed, air-flow, speed  
into the distance.

A R O A D finds this valley  
Climbing down from the gap  
Two ridges set ajar.  
Suddenly the town stands looking up  
From under these ridges  
And those, longer and higher, beyond it.

And through the town a river  
Comes from leisured avenues of cypress  
(Standing mock solemn,  
Shading tangled pleasure in old gardens)  
To where the valley's end  
Is all one lake, dead-still.

Only the ruin of these foot-hills  
Could forge a watershed;  
The many lost springs  
Relentless desert uses and lets die;  
Yet here is force for living,  
First gathered blindly, a snow-drift,  
Then fanatic with the flood of streams,  
Subtle at last in every well-spring.

This town, so often planned as a city,  
Returning earthquake has conquered and thrown together  
Again and again.  
Still the huge pressures of empty country  
Form at their centre lasting jewels,  
Build here in a miniature proportion.

From the upper valley  
No cypress watches.  
Proud as high standards furled the poplars keep  
Perfection hid in their small meadows  
Or vines camp out upon a lazy slope  
All the long summer  
Maturing improvident, quick wits for their strong  
wine—  
—Those vines that seem to winter  
Roots left dead in ruined ground.  
A force of full living is here.

RARELY do I face the real earth,  
Whose life-blood is chill damp,  
The pulse of whose slow life is decay.  
In gardens or any landscape  
I only find  
The surface-detail of growth  
And abstract distance.

I must dare know  
This ever dying flesh  
Certain of after-life as wild-flowers are of seeding.  
The stones shall loll  
Upon my rotted body and regret  
That not for them so deep a change as death,  
Such ecstasy of quick decay.

The huge invisible, already shadowing me,  
And, at the last, deep ground  
Hold for my force their own infinities.

Grow out in reasoned facets,  
Crystalline cities,  
Your forces held in solution.  
Under the compression of massed atoms  
Rise, balanced but alert,  
To re-combine the future  
Along sure lines of impersonal design.

Grow from live instinct,  
Deep-rooted cities,  
Each with a style's evolved flora,  
Detached climates of thought.  
Only in you  
Comes to full flower  
The international, the grafted strength of culture.

But be strong, O cities,  
To set those steady lights  
Above your present glare of half-lit smoke—  
—To range them high  
And surely as Orion astride a summer dawn.

It is your planning must quarry  
Profound strata of countryside  
Silted too deep with tradition,  
Too comfortably overgrown.

E A C H inbred State  
Affects us like hereditary disease:  
Injustice breeds contagious violence,  
Secreted faults must rot all peace.

Still like a life-blood  
Is the intercourse of our true selves—  
—Opinion with a latitude  
Wide as from love to hate:  
Action conditioned always  
By those restraints innate in a free contact.

Though now infected is reason  
By an endemic war;  
Though we rave with fever  
In these horrors of our own shaping:  
Germs that to death prey mutually on germs  
Yet shall leave clean at last a tested body.

THE strides of pylon  
 Clear this hill and leave behind the village.  
 A dipping climb, one turn, an urgent dive,  
 Pilot the cables of new power to break these skylines.

As forcibly had alien roads to cut  
 First causeways into the marsh  
 Or hedgerow to map free hillside.  
 As foreign, in their time,  
 Seemed the plantations of crowded sapling  
 Where with no need of purpose a heath  
 Lived solitary, content to breed but native turf.

The park has ruined a proud, empty house but ended  
 By ranging between suburbs  
 Shade for their rest  
 From arches of chosen timber.

The brutal embankment learns  
 Not to exploit  
 Accepted now as fully as a contour.

With true furrows, by strict hedging,  
 These disciplines have given  
 Fields the finished comfort of gardens  
 And landscape a build  
 Proof against rash unrest.

Each violence was energy released,  
Less against an individual moment  
In terrors of change  
Than for slow earth to move by its own gravity  
Nearer essential peace.

The stressed line of form from use,  
A living technique in growth,  
These are sound roots of beauty,  
These have truth for ground-plan.





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1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.